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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Fifty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1455th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Friday, 16 March 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. SHERIFIS

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 6) (continued)

Twelfth to fifteenth periodic reports of Greece (CERD/C/363/Add. 4)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Telalian, Mr. Kastanas, Mr. Giannoulas and Ms. Babassika (Greece) took places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. TELALIAN (Greece), apologizing for Greece's late submission of its fifteenth periodic report (CERD/C/363/Add.4), said that it had submitted a revised version of the report containing additional information on recent measures taken in the human rights field, but that, owing to time constraints, the document had not been translated into all working languages. Members could consult the revised report for further information on the situation of Roma and their integration in society, programmes adopted in the field of intercultural education and the new bill on migrant workers and their rights.

3. She then referred briefly to the human rights institutions cited in paragraph 9 of the report, and also drew attention to the establishment of the Interministerial Committee on International Humanitarian Law, which had later become the National Commission on the Implementation and Dissemination of International Humanitarian Law.

4. Domestic courts directly applied the provisions of international treaties to which Greece was a party and adopted the interpretation of international monitoring bodies. Special measures had recently been taken to ensure compliance with the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights, for example on the reopening of criminal proceedings after a Court judgement finding a violation of the right to a fair trial. Furthermore, the Supreme Administrative Court had accepted the need to adopt measures to attain effective gender equality. Affirmative action measures would soon acquire a constitutional dimension once the ongoing revision of the Constitution was completed. Greece also cooperated closely with, inter alia, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT).

5. Turning to the question of aliens and migrant workers, she said that, traditionally, Greece had been a country of emigration, but over the past decade it had witnessed a mass influx of immigrants, particularly from neighbouring countries, as a result of the collapse of former communist regimes and ensuing ethnic conflicts. Today, it was estimated that immigrants amounted to 7 per cent of the total population, most of them having come from Albania illegally in search of better living conditions.

6. Following events in Albania in 1997, many criminal bands that had looted weapons from the Albanian army had been involved in arms trafficking and organized crime in Greece and other European countries. A number of border areas in Greece had been hard hit by such activities, leading to a sense of insecurity among local inhabitants and fuelling a negative stereotype about Albanians. As a result, there had been isolated xenophobic incidents targeting foreigners. But such reactions did not amount to racism, and there had certainly not been any

signs of racial hatred or prejudice or any acts of racist aggression committed against foreigners. No political party in Greece had ever adopted a racist slant or right-wing extremist slogans, since such an ideology held no appeal for the population. On the contrary, the Greeks were very alive to the issue of racism, since many compatriots had been immigrants in other countries.

7. However, Greece had failed to introduce a long-term immigration policy that established the rules for legal entry and residence and for social integration. There had been a correlation between the rise in crime by illegal immigrants and the lack of an appropriate social policy, many illegal immigrants having had no choice but to seek a livelihood in criminal activities. The 1991 legislation on aliens had not provided a solution to immigrant-related problems, because it had focused more on police controls and the prevention of immigration than on promoting social integration. The 1998 measures for the regularization of illegal immigrants had yielded some positive results. The number of crimes by foreigners had decreased and some 165,000 green cards had been issued. But the measures had been insufficient to deal with all the existing problems.

8. The new immigration bill currently under discussion in Parliament was therefore an important step forward, because it created the foundation for a new immigration policy based on the rule of law and respect for international human rights instruments. It provided for both centralized and decentralized public services for aliens. Immigrants' residence permits were no longer to be granted by the police, but by the local authorities. It safeguarded the rights of migrant workers and established conditions for their social integration, regulated issues of employment and social security, protected immigrant minors and ensured their access to education and social security services, regardless of whether they were legal or not, guaranteed the right to work and imposed fines on employers who employed illegal migrants, and, unlike earlier legislation, allowed foreigners to change employers without losing their residence or work permit. In addition, a regularization procedure was open to illegal migrants under certain conditions. Those who had been unable to regularize their status in 1998 had been given a second chance. Special provision had been made for family reunification. Promotion of forced prostitution and illicit trafficking in foreign women was also punishable. The bill before Parliament made cross-reference to Law 927/1979, which imposed criminal sanctions for racist and xenophobic acts. Racism was now a crime that could be prosecuted ex officio.

9. She then referred to the presidential decrees described in the report (para. 45) and to efforts made in the field of education, notably to promote intercultural schools (para. 48), of which there were now 21.

10. Turning to the question of minorities, she said that Greece was a country which respected cultural diversity. All persons living on Greek territory were free to manifest their own religion, preserve their own culture and speak their own language. Many groups spoke a language other than Greek but were fully integrated in Greek society. Similarly, all persons were free to identify themselves as having a different ethnic or national origin.

11. The only officially recognized minority in Greece was the Muslim minority of Western Thrace. It enjoyed issopolitia (equal status) and issonomia (equal enjoyment and protection of the law), and a whole range of measures were in place to promote its religious, cultural and linguistic identity. Recently, new textbooks had been introduced which for the first

time were based on the cultural background of the Muslim minority. In the previous three years, the number of Muslim pupils attending secondary school had increased by 300 per cent, which showed that the new measures had been effective. There were special quotas for the admission of 400 Muslim minority students to Greek universities allowing them to dispense with the national examination procedure required of other Greek students. Greek was taught as a second language to Muslim pupils to help them improve their academic performance and facilitate their enrolment in Greek universities. Details on minority education and schooling were contained in the revised report.

12. Referring to the issue of the appointment of the mufti, which had already been addressed in the report (paras. 30 to 34), she said that an application had been submitted to the European Court of Human Rights by one of the irregularly elected mufti, Mr. Agga, who, like Mr. Serif, had been convicted of pretence of authority (para. 34), Mr. Serif's conviction having already been overturned by the Court.

13. All Greek Governments had refused to refer to the whole Muslim minority as "Turkish" owing to the actual make-up of the minority and the conviction that the political designs behind that assertion were not conducive to the peaceful co-existence of the various groups. However, whereas in the past using the name "Turk" in titles of unions or organizations had posed difficulties, the Supreme Court had recently overruled a decision by the court of appeal, finding that such use was not illegal in itself unless the organization's activities were directed against the public order or national security and ordering the court of appeal to review the case.

14. Her Government was working to find solutions to the pressing needs of Roma and ensure their full integration into the social, economic and political life of the country. An Interministerial Committee had been set up in March 2000 to work towards those goals. Most Roma lived in camps and tents which did not meet decent standards. The Government's objective was to put up prefabricated homes or provide building plots with the necessary amenities, as well as granting construction loans. The success of those initiatives depended on the cooperation of the municipal authorities, who in many cases resisted their implementation.

15. A major plan of action had been introduced providing for special programmes in the areas of housing, education, health care, vocational training, employment, cultural activities and sports, with substantial government funding (3.5 billion drachmas). The aim was initially to cover the needs of 25,000 Roma and ultimately those of the entire Roma community. As of November 2000, 822 homes had been made available to Roma, and construction of another 1,000 had been approved. Some 5,000 Roma had already been settled in organized camps in a number of regions. In other regions, implementation of those programmes was under way or nearing completion. She referred the Committee to details of those programmes given in the revised report and also to the "education of Roma children" programme discussed in the periodic report (paras. 40-43). Those efforts had raised educational standards among Roma children and increased the number of those reaching secondary school. The drop-out rate in 2000 had declined from 75 per cent to only 25 per cent.

16. Police personnel and other law enforcement officials were being given training aimed at heightening cultural awareness, fighting prejudices and providing instruction in the legal aspects of racial discrimination, and covering the issues described in paragraphs 50 to 54 of the periodic

report. The head of the Greek police services had recently registered a number of human rights violations committed by police officers which would be the subject of special investigations. An educational programme would be set up to highlight the findings. As to remedies available to the victims of racial discrimination committed by the police, Presidential Decree No. 22 of 1996 provided for severe punishment of police officers for physical or psychological abuse or violence or any other form of degrading treatment and also stipulated that the guilty parties were to be removed from the police service.

17. Clearly, conditions of detention for foreigners awaiting expulsion were not entirely satisfactory, but a number of measures had already been taken to improve the situation. Several detention facilities had been opened in 2000. Efforts were being made to meet basic health and hygienic requirements. The immigration bill provided for the setting up of special detention centres for foreigners awaiting deportation. To avoid the detention of aliens awaiting expulsion, the authorities granted permission for temporary stay, on which more details were given in the revised report.

18. On the subject of the media, the Greek authorities were working to strike a balance between the protection of freedom of expression and the need to fight all forms of racist and xenophobic speech. Broadcasting programmes and advertisements that incited hatred on grounds of race, religion, nationality or gender was prohibited by law. The National Radio and Television Council had issued relevant regulations and recommendations. Similar prohibitions were also included in the codes of conduct issued by professional associations of journalists and newspaper owners. Media diversity was promoted by public radio, which broadcast 30-minute news bulletins daily in 12 languages, including Albanian, Russian, Turkish, Polish and Romanian for immigrants residing in Greece.

19. In closing, she said that the Greek Government would do everything in its power to eradicate the causes of racism and xenophobia. Improving the economic situation of certain groups and raising public awareness of the issues were the best way of tackling those problems. The Committee's recommendations would serve as useful tools for Greece's future legislation and policy.

20. The CHAIRMAN, responding to a question by Mr. ABOUL-NASR, pointed out that the revised updating report of the State party referred to in the introduction had not been received in time for translation into the Committee's working languages. It had not therefore been issued as an official document for the session and some members of the Committee were not familiar with its content.

21. Ms. TELALIAN (Greece) said that it would be extremely useful if the Committee could take the recent measures described in the revised report into consideration in assessing the implementation of the Convention in Greece.

22. Mr. RECHETOV (Country Rapporteur) thanked the Greek authorities for submitting a report (CERD/C/363/Add.4) that adopted a self-critical approach, was replete with useful information and took into account the Committee's concluding observations on the previous periodic report (A/47/18, paras. 75-92). The update, in English only, was similarly structured

and contained, inter alia, information about special programmes for the Roma population and measures on behalf of aliens and migrant workers. He had also noted with interest, from the delegation's introductory statement, that a number of places were reserved for national minorities in Greek universities.

23. Greece had ratified all major international instruments for the prevention of racial discrimination, including the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and intended shortly to make the declaration under article 14 of the Convention that would allow individuals and groups in Greece to submit petitions to the Committee. According to paragraph 7 of the report, international human rights treaties were directly applicable by the Greek courts and due attention was paid by the courts, when interpreting such instruments, to the case law of international judicial or quasi-judicial bodies. Many references were made throughout the report to decisions of the European Court of Human Rights concerning Greece. In cases where the Court had ruled against Greece, requiring, for example, the payment of compensation to the victims of human rights violations, the authorities had gone even further and reversed decisions which, in the Court's opinion, had been unjust. That kind of response to criticism by an international judicial body was highly commendable.

24. Paragraph 8 of the report stated that the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights had been made widely known to lawyers and judges. Were they also familiar with the provisions of the Convention?

25. He was impressed by the fact that, according to paragraph 9, the mass media in Greece were required to respect the principle of non-discrimination and to comply with legislative and other provisions prohibiting racism and xenophobia, and that, under a draft code of ethics, journalists would not be permitted to identify accused or convicted persons solely in terms of their ethnic origin or religious beliefs, a pernicious form of stereotyping. He noted from paragraph 11 of the report that Greece was aware that ethnic origin could exacerbate the unequal status of women and that appropriate affirmative action was necessary in that area.

26. Greece had adopted the correct approach to the Muslim minority in Thrace by seeking to integrate its members into Greek society so that they were on an equal footing with the majority Christian population rather than aiming at forcible assimilation. The Muslim minority apparently consisted of three ethnic groups: persons of Turkish origin, indigenous Pomaks who spoke a Slavic dialect and Roma. Observing that self-identification was now universally recognized as the basis for assignment to an ethnic or racial group, he noted the statement in paragraph 16 of the report that objective criteria should also be taken into account, and asked the delegation to explain what those criteria were. He understood that the Greek authorities were opposed to attempts, allegedly under foreign pressure, to have all Muslims in Thrace classified as being of Turkish origin. If such pressure existed, he acknowledged that it could have serious political consequences.

27. He noted that the threshold for admission of political parties to Parliament, at 3 per cent of the countrywide vote, was comparatively low and that a considerable number of Muslims had been elected to the office of mayor or councillor at the regional level.

28. With regard to education for minorities, paragraph 23 of the report admitted that the secondary schools for the Muslim minority in the prefectures of Xanthi and Rhodopi were not large enough to admit all applicants, a problem mentioned by a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). He noted with interest that the Koran was taught in Arabic in schools attended by the Pomaks in Xanthi. According to paragraph 27, facilities were provided for the study of Greek as a second language. Was he correct in assuming that Turkish was thus taught as the first language in some minority schools? If so, it was a very liberal provision without parallel in most other European countries.

29. He understood that the religious privileges of the Muslim minority were largely governed by the Lausanne Treaty of 1923. Again, he wondered whether there was any other European country in which Islamic spiritual leaders exercised judicial functions in respect of family and inheritance matters, provided that their decisions were not contrary to the Constitution. However, a number of NGOs had criticized the fact that muftis were not elected but appointed by presidential decree on the basis of a recommendation by the Minister of Education and Religion. The European Court of Human Rights had ruled against Greece in a case brought by an elected mufti who had been imprisoned for the crime of "pretence of authority". Clearly, such matters should be resolved by agreement between the authorities and the representatives of the religious community concerned in order to prevent the legal guarantees established by the State entailing unwarranted interference in the affairs of a section of the population.

30. Both NGOs and European regional organizations recognized that Greece had put a great deal of effort into improving the lot of the Roma community. But the report itself admitted that the situation was still unsatisfactory. The Roma were still the victims of social exclusion and negative stereotyping despite the authorities' attempts to change social attitudes. He was puzzled by the reference in paragraph 37 of the report to the "re-establishment" of the Roma people. What exactly did the term mean? The NGO material provided to the Committee drew attention to cases of eviction of Roma and physical assaults on members of the community, primarily at the local level.

31. He welcomed the delegation's reference to action being taken against law enforcement officers who violated the rights of members of ethnic minorities. Paragraphs 58 and 59 of the report also described provisions for criminal and disciplinary action against officers guilty of improper or unlawful behaviour. But paragraph 57 indicated that no complaints had yet been filed concerning misbehaviour based on racial prejudice on the part of police personnel. The Committee urged the State party to keep it informed of any developments in that regard.

32. With regard to freedom of association, he noted with interest that the Greek courts had refused to apply the provision of the Civil Code that made it difficult for aliens to manage associations on the grounds that it was contrary to the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights.

33. Referring to paragraph 63 of the report, he noted that authorization to open places of worship depended on production of a certificate guaranteeing that certain safety standards were met. It was alleged that the local authorities took advantage of those regulations in some cases to

withhold authorization from certain applicants. He welcomed the fact that the Greek authorities were cooperating with the European Court of Human Rights in preventing restrictive practices, also in respect of prosecutions under Law 1363/1998 concerning proselytism (paragraph 65 of the report).

34. In response to criticism by NGOs and European organizations, the Greek authorities had repealed article 19 of the Citizenship Code concerning the withdrawal of citizenship from persons of non-Greek ethnic origin who left the country without plans to return. He asked whether the authorities had considered making amends to victims of the implementation of article 19 in the past by restoring their citizenship. He noted that the Greek authorities had given the assurance that article 20 of the Citizenship Code, which provided for the withdrawal of citizenship from persons who committed acts contrary to the interests of Greece while living abroad, would in future be applied only in very exceptional cases.

35. He drew attention to the 1999 report of the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) based on material submitted by Greek NGOs. Covering issues such as citizenship, immigration, the opening of places of worship, freedom of association, Roma rights and anti-Albanian sentiment, it combined criticism with praise for the genuine change in Greek society brought about by the action of the Greek authorities.

36. Ms. McDOUGALL asked why the State party officially recognized only one minority - the Muslims of Thrace - and on what criteria. She sought further details on the petition submitted on behalf of Mr. Agga to the European Court of Human Rights. More information would have been appreciated in the report on the status of women, in accordance with the Committee's General Recommendation XXV. To what extent did Greece's fairly progressive legislation to protect women's rights apply to minority groups and benefit migrant workers?

37. She sought clarification regarding the reported practice of not issuing work permits to migrants from Africa, Asia and Latin America on the basis of an administrative decision. What was the rationale behind such a decision? Had the situation now changed, and if not, why not?

38. According to paragraph 45 (b) of the report (CERD/C/363/Add.4), Presidential Decrees 358 and 359/1997 established full equality of rights in employment between Greek citizens and foreign nationals legally residing in Greece; however, NGOs reported many complaints from legal immigrants of discrimination with respect to employment. What steps was the Government taking to monitor those sectors of the labour market where immigrants were usually employed? She was particularly concerned about domestic service, a sector not usually subject to inspection, where even legally resident foreign employees had difficulty in lodging complaints about their working conditions for fear of verbal and physical abuse by their employers, or worse still the withholding of their identity documents, without which they could be summarily deported when approaching the authorities. Was there a viable complaints procedure available to such immigrants, affording them the necessary protection in the event of ill-treatment by employers or professional misconduct by public officials? She requested information on the impact of the 1996 disciplinary rules providing for sanctions against police officers in the event of official misconduct.

39. She noted that some important provisions were missing from the new immigration bill. Although they might be covered by other legislation, the fact remained that the bill would not provide for comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. According to paragraph 56, the bill would enable prosecuting authorities to press charges ex officio in the case of racist and discriminatory acts. The delegation had mentioned that cross-references were made in the bill to Law 927/1979. Perhaps more explicit provisions should be included in the new legislation.

40. Mr. VALENCIA RODRIGUEZ welcomed the references in the report to the Committee's concluding observations on the previous periodic report. The ratification of various international human rights instruments showed the State party's commitment to promoting respect for such rights. He hoped that the Government would decide to make the declaration under article 14 of the Convention shortly.

41. The fact that the Convention was directly applicable by the courts was an important guarantee. He recommended that the instrument and the Committee's general recommendations should be publicized in legal circles. Applauding the establishment of various independent human rights bodies, he asked whether the National Radio and Television Council had dealt with any cases of racial or ethnic discrimination. The Committee should be kept informed of any action taken by the human rights bodies whose work was relevant to the Convention. The 1998 Council of State decision mentioned in paragraphs 10 and 11 of the report was indeed significant, since it provided jurisprudence that was also applicable to the State party's anti-discrimination policy.

42. With respect to the Muslim minority of Thrace, it seemed that Greece had taken the necessary steps, given the existing legal-political framework, to honour its international obligations and avoid racial and ethnic discrimination against the community. Progress made in the sphere of political representation was welcome. It was to be hoped that the remaining problems with regard to education would be satisfactorily resolved. The possibility of increasing the number of schools in the towns of Xanthi and Komotini might be considered as a way of coping with the growing demand for school admissions. Such solutions were viable on account of the good relations that prevailed between Turkey and Greece.

43. He was also satisfied with progress made with respect to freedom of religion. There was no doubt that it was difficult to reconcile Islamic law with Greek public order. Current efforts should be pursued with the aim of ensuring that all inhabitants of Greece abided by the same legislation, in order to avoid possible legal controversy in future.

44. Although the measures adopted with respect to the Roma people had proved relatively successful, particularly in the field of education, their situation was hardly satisfactory and called for further policy decisions and resources so as to improve it over time.

45. Referring to paragraph 45 of the report, he stressed the importance of the current procedures for the legalization of migrant workers and expressed satisfaction at the application of the principle of full equality of employment rights. The ultimate aim of measures targeted at migrant workers, refugees and asylum-seekers should be their full integration into society. In that connection, he sought up-to-date information on the progress of the new immigration bill.

Welcoming the action taken in the light of the Committee's General Recommendation XIII, he recommended that specific emphasis should be laid on the broader dissemination of the Convention in the training of border guards and immigration officers.

46. According to the information provided in paragraph 55 of the report, Greece by and large complied with its obligations under article 4 of the Convention. He noted in particular that Law 927/1979 had never been applied. In view of the repeated refusal of the Greek courts to apply article 107 of the Introductory Law to the Civil Code, described in paragraph 60 of the report, it would perhaps be preferable to amend the article in question. Also, were the results of the decision to repeal article 19 of the 1955 Citizenship Code satisfactory? For instance, had those persons who had lost Greek citizenship in the past been able to reacquire it?

47. With respect to article 7 of the Convention, he suggested that educational programmes should include information on the Convention. In conclusion, he recommended that the report and the Committee's concluding observations thereon should be widely publicized, particularly among the minority groups, which could provide valuable input for further government action.

48. Mr. ABOUL-NASR said that, although on the whole he was satisfied with the State party's report, he had one major concern - the confusion between the terms "Muslim" and "Turkish". The identification of the Muslims as "Turkish" was not a problem confined to Greece and the Balkan region, where, for historical reasons, it had particularly pejorative connotations, but had also been common in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as a whole. A further point required clarification: Islam was not a race but a religion, whose followers could be of many different races. He appealed to members of the delegation and the Committee to bear those two factors in mind.

49. The report referred to the Muslim minority in Thrace as consisting of three main ethnic groups: people of Turkish origin, Pomaks and Roma. It was certainly news to him that the Roma people were Muslims! No mention was made, however, of the members of another ethnic group found in north-western Greece who were also Muslim, namely the Albanians. Were they not considered a minority? Moreover, it was far from true that there were no problems between the Greeks and the Albanians. Until very recently there had been a de facto state of war between the Greek and Albanian communities. Lastly, the report referred to some members of the Muslim minority contesting the appointment of the muftis by the Government. Why were they not allowed to elect their own muftis?

50. Mr. THORNBERRY, referring to the revised report, asked on what basis the statistical data relating to the Muslim minority in Greece had been compiled, it being his understanding that in the recent census ethnic and linguistic data had not been collected. He nonetheless welcomed the careful choice of words in references to the ethnic minorities, for instance "of Turkish origin". In that connection he asked what impact the recent Supreme Court decision that the use of the term "Turkish" as a denomination of a union or association was not illegal per se was likely to have on the Government's approach to terminology. With reference to the explanatory note to article 3 of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection

of National Minorities cited in the report, what did the State party understand by "objective criteria"? It was important for States parties to define concepts clearly in order to comply fully with the requirements of the international instrument in question.

51. He observed that, in response to ECRI's second report on Greece (CRI (2000) 32), the Government had stated that it held no ideological position on the nature of Greek society. In the light of the numerous examples of cultural diversity given in the report, he sought clarification regarding its further statement that they [the policies of the Greek Government] did not imply adherence by the Government to the notion of a multicultural character of Greek society. What psychological barrier had yet to be broken down before the Government would recognize the multicultural nature of Greek society?

52. In the light of the statement in the ECRI report that the shortcomings of the Greek education system warranted urgent attention and would have the greatest long-term impact on the viability of the Muslim community, were the educational measures outlined in the report considered sufficient? A number of sources, including ECRI, had reported a considerable degree of hostility towards foreigners in Greece. In connection with article 7 of the Convention, what steps were being taken to educate the general public? There was perhaps also a need to place greater emphasis on tolerance in education programmes for minority groups, aliens and repatriated Greeks.

53. Mr. DIACONU said that the dialogue under way testified to a more open attitude than in the past and reflected the Government's efforts to comply with its obligations under the Convention and meet the Committee's concerns. The report contained ample information and references to case law and in general there was a more positive approach to the question of minorities and awareness of the dangers of discrimination, as borne out by the number of new laws passed. Two examples of anti-discrimination measures worthy of emulation in other European States were the National Radio and Television Council Regulation 3/1991 and the Code of Journalistic Deontology. Other positive aspects included the institution of the Office of the Ombudsman and the establishment of a National Commission on Human Rights. With regard to ethnic minorities, he noted that the report referred to the teaching of religion in Turkish and of the Koran in Arabic in Greek-language secondary schools. Was there no provision for teaching in the Slavic dialect used by the Pomaks?

54. He sought clarification of the disparity between the official figure of 15,000 Roma in Greece and that of approximately 200,000 furnished by the Hellenic League of Human Rights. While it was encouraging that the Government was implementing a number of programmes in favour of the Roma, there had been reports of forced evictions. He requested details of government plans to ensure that the rights of that minority were protected. It was also satisfying to learn that Pomaks and Turks were elected to Parliament on the same ticket as Greeks. Other European countries would do well to emulate the positive measures taken to protect vulnerable groups.

55. Turning to education and noting that special classes were available to Roma children, he asked whether those classes were taught separately or with Turks and Greeks, and whether the Roma language was the language of instruction. He also wished to know how many Albanians

lived in Greece and what status they enjoyed. He would like the delegation to provide more information on the statement contained in the fifteenth periodic report (para. 48) that Greek schools had a high proportion of Albanian-speaking pupils, who presumably lived in concentrated groups. Certain NGOs had claimed that Albanians were often forcibly evicted. It was commendable that education was compulsory for all children for nine years, even if some could not study their native language.

56. Mr. PILLAI said that the functions of the Ombudsman's Office, set out in the report, and the fact that it had settled a significant percentage of the increasing number of complaints filed by vulnerable groups showed that the Ombudsman was really addressing racial discrimination issues. Since that Office had extrajudicial authority for settling disputes with the Administration, could it, if it failed to find a solution, seek redress in a court of law on behalf of the complainants? He congratulated the Greek authorities on the establishment of the most diverse and pluralistic National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) of any country that had appeared before the Committee. He wished to know how the NCHR exercised the various powers granted to it to monitor compliance of the Greek legal order with international human rights standards, referred to in the updating report.

57. Mr. TANG Chengyuan commended the State party on its clear explanations of its past and prospective measures for implementing the Convention. The growing number of illegal immigrants among the 7 per cent of the population consisting of migrant workers placed a high social and financial burden on the Government, which was called upon to solve the problem in accordance with the pertinent international instruments. He was perturbed by a Human Rights Watch report that one prison in Athens exclusively housed illegal immigrants from 34 countries, who were forced to live in abominable conditions, were poorly fed and were victims of police brutality. Commenting that there were minimum international standards even for prisoners of war, he urged the State party to take steps to ensure that reasonable standards were maintained. However, he was pleased to learn that the prison authorities were open to requests for visits and endeavoured to solve any problems brought to their attention.

58. While noting that Parliament was currently studying a new draft immigration bill, the Committee had been informed that the situation of immigrants was far worse than stated in the periodic report. That might well impair Greece's image, and the Government would be obliged to assume the responsibilities that flowed from its neglect of that group. He urged the authorities to undertake both the legislative work and the training of law enforcement and other government officials needed to ensure proper treatment of illegal immigrants.

59. Mr. YUTZIS regretted the late submission of the updated report, which precluded a meaningful dialogue. He asked the delegation to explain the status of NGOs in Greece and whether they were called upon to contribute to the country's periodic reports to the treaty bodies. Multiculturalism was a contentious issue, acceptance of which was often seen as a threat to a country's own culture; that was particularly true of a country like Greece, which had traditions rooted in its own racial and religious history but in a short space of time had become a country of immigration. However, the increasing flows worldwide of immigrants seeking work or simply a better life were a present day reality; the point was that they could lead to xenophobic or racist acts, and it was for the State party to endeavour to discover why those problems arose.

60. He was puzzled as to why both the country's reports referred to all settlements of Roma as temporary and wished to know whether it was the Roma themselves or the authorities who decided on their permanent or temporary nature. Did the Roma, for instance, wish to leave the settlement in the municipality of Aspropyrgos referred to in the report (CERD/C/363/Add.4, para. 36 (b))? Various sources maintained that the removals were forcible and had been done with particular callousness in Aspropyrgos.

61. He requested statistics on the programmes to promote minority languages, as well as objective information on the freedom of individuals from a minority group to choose the society to which they wished to belong. Greece, with its long religious tradition, had a special form of worship embedded in Eastern thinking and spirituality. Multiculturalism did not entail a difference in colour or language alone, but also had religious connotations.

62. Mr. SHAHI also stressed the need for reports to reach the Committee in sufficient time to permit careful study. Greece's report contained many positive features and he hoped that the State party would address the pending problematic issues. Sadly, Greece, a country with a glorious tradition and the mother of many civilizations, was prey to increasing xenophobia, with some 47 per cent of its population subscribing to racist views, a state of affairs which required the authorities to be extremely vigilant.

63. The information provided attested to the country's political will to combat racial discrimination but, there were alarming reports of police brutality, poor detention conditions and ill-treatment of prospective deportees - in which Greece was indeed not alone. He looked with favour on the fact that some Roma wished to identify with the Turkish minority, while others preferred to identify with the Greek majority, choosing the group where they would feel more accepted. He was gratified to learn from one NGO that the Greek majority was accommodating toward the Roma. While the State party did fulfil its international obligations regarding the treatment meted out to the population of Western Thrace, other minorities should be treated likewise. He shared Mr. Aboul-Nasr's dismay at the habit - encouraged by the media - of identifying people by their religion rather than their nationality.

64. Ms. TELALIAN (Greece) said that the authorities had used the language found in both the Lausanne Treaty and the 1913 Treaty of Athens, which referred to the "Muslim minority".

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.